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# Casey's comic opera

X William Casey's timing couldn't be worse. Just when people all over the world are blasting the Soviet Union's close-mouthed response to the Chernobyl disaster, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency is trying to silence the American news media.

Last week, the peripatetic Casey, who has never met a polygraph he didn't like, threatened the editors and publishers of several major publications with prosecution because they printed classified information leaked to them for that purpose by the Reagan administration.

Casey would make a wonderful character in a comic opera about a totalitarian bureaucracy. Where are Gilbert and Sullivan now that we need them?

Unfortunately, Casey was serious when he told officials of The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Washington Times, Time magazine and Newsweek magazine that he might prosecute them under a 1950 statute forbidding publication of "classified" information about codes, ciphers and communications intelligence activities.

Casey is in a snit about stories describing how the National Security Agency broke the Libyan codes and gave President Reagan the "smoking gun" he needed to justify the U.S. bombing of Libya. These stories came straight from the White House, which was trading secrets for political gain.

If media officials are to be prosecuted, Casey must also bring to trial the president, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and other defense officials who told the world how Americans broke the Libyan code and how American bombers made their raid on Tripoli.

Not that the Soviets didn't know about the U.S. code-breaking capability. They've been trying to counteract our electronic and communications intelligence equipment for years. However, they might not have been aware of the efficiency of the U.S. night bombing sensors until the president and the defense secretary told the world about it.

For that, Casey wants to send newsmen to jail.

Casey also reportedly attempted to prevent publication of an upcoming Washington Post news story about the sale of U.S. defense secrets to the Soviets by Ronald W. Pelton, a former communications specialist for the National Security Agency, who is awaiting trial for espionage.

It was rumored that the Post had obtained the agency's internal report on how badly Pelton's activities damaged U.S. intelligence capabilities.

Obviously, the Soviets already know what they got from Pelton. Apparently Casey is desperate to prevent the American public from knowing as well. What a classic Poo-Bah he would make.

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